

RARE DENVER MINT ISSUE

Experimental Coin

The first confirmed 1974-D aluminum Lincoln cent will cross the auction block in April.

➤ THE ONLY known example of an experimental 1974 aluminum Lincoln cent struck at the Denver Mint has been authenticated, graded and certified by Professional Coin Grading Service (PCGS). Says PCGS President Don Willis, “It never ceases to amaze me when an ultra rarity or, in this case, a new discovery coin, comes into our offices.”

While there are several references to the striking of aluminum cents at the Philadelphia Mint in 1974, only one document (a letter to the editor in the March 20, 2001, edition of *Numismatic News*) mentioned that test coins were produced at the Denver Mint. The original owner of the specimen, Randy Lawrence, says he “had no idea what that penny



PHOTOS: PCGS

▲ THIS RARE 1974 LINCOLN CENT is expected to fetch close to \$250,000 at an upcoming auction.

was worth.” He inherited the coin from his late father, Harry Edmond Lawrence, who was deputy superintendent of the Denver Mint at the time the cent was made.

The rare coin was exhibited for the first time at California’s Long

Beach Coin, Currency, Stamp & Sports Collectible Show in January. The coin is valued at about \$250,000 and will be offered by Heritage Auctions at the Central States Numismatic Society’s April convention in Schaumburg, Illinois.

POP CULTURE

Making the Elvis/Lindbergh Connection

Historic U.S. Mint medals became wardrobe accessories for the “king of rock ’n’ roll.”

➤ WHAT POSSIBLE CONNECTION could there be between Elvis Presley, the “king of rock ’n’ roll,” and aviator Charles A. Lindbergh? You might be surprised to learn the link is numismatic in nature. In 1968, after starring in a string of largely forgettable movies, Elvis came out of semi-retirement and resumed his live performances. His manager, Colonel Tom Parker, contacted fashion designer Bill Belew about creating a wardrobe that would give Elvis

a unique stage presence. Comfort was paramount, so Belew stayed with Elvis’ signature gabardine jumpsuits, but introduced some special touches, such as exaggerated Napoleonic collars. One particular belt was crafted in white leather embellished with embroidery and brass chains; the crowning adornments were medals featuring a lone eagle in flight. The latter pieces were, in fact, U.S. Mint reproductions of the 1928 Congressional medal awarded to Lindbergh for his solo, transatlantic flight in May 1927. Designed by sculptor Laura Gardin Fraser, the medal weighs 5 ounces and measures 70mm. (It would be interesting to know what Fraser would have thought of Elvis Presley, gyrating in front of thousands of screaming fans, with examples of her medallic art affixed to the belt around his waist.)

a unique stage presence.

In October 1999, Guernsey’s, a New York City auction house, conducted a sale of Elvis memorabilia at the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. The auction featured more than 2,000 items. Among them was Lot C52, described as “Elvis Presley’s white leather belt. Brass discs around the belt picture flying birds. Blue and gold embroidery decorates the belt in the shape of peacock feathers. Hanging brass chains. Original invoice paid on August 2, 1973, from Bill Belew to Elvis on brown Bill Belew stationery... invoice totals \$3,500.” The auction house estimated the belt would sell for \$23,000-\$25,000; when the gavel fell, the price realized was \$35,500.

It is doubtful Elvis ever knew the numismatic story behind his custom-made belt, but the flamboyant accessory surely added to his stage persona.

—Michael B. Costanzo

◀ ELVIS WAS KNOWN to give copies of his belts to friends and fans, but he never reproduced the original “peacock belt” adorned with Lindbergh medals.

Actual Size: 70mm



PHOTOS: MICHAEL COSTANZO & HERITAGE AUCTIONS (MEDAL)